



Accessibility at Gloucestershire Archives

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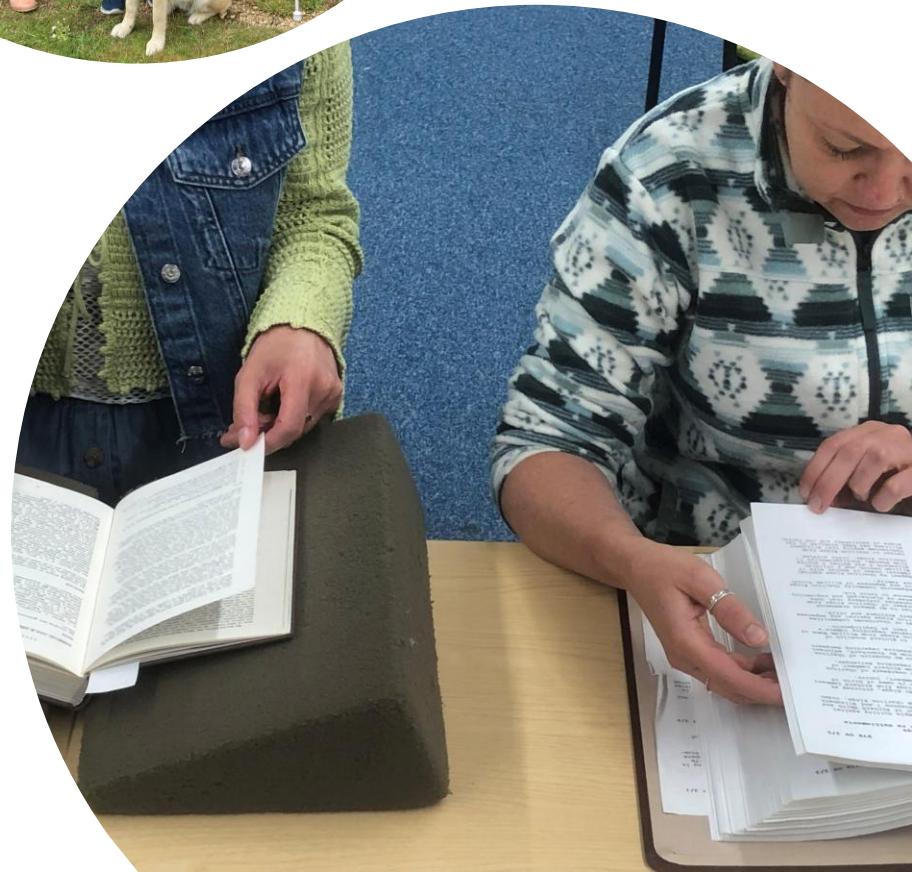
gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/

Jemma Fowkes, Community Heritage Officer

My role as Accessibility Champion:

- 1) to improve access to our services for those with disabilities, and,
- 2) to investigate what items we have in our collections relating to disability.

Please be aware that this presentation will deal with themes and historic language which could be considered upsetting and offensive today. There will be discussion of mental and physical health, illness, death, suicide & other sensitive areas.





About Gloucestershire Archives

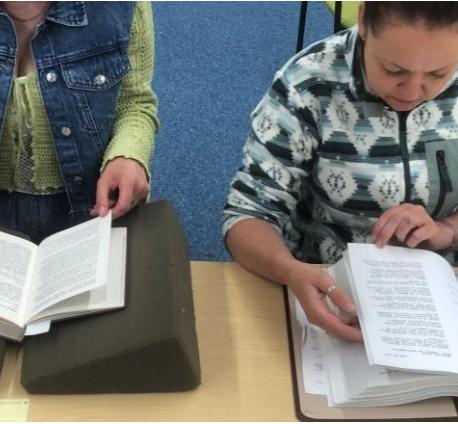
- Part of Gloucestershire County Council
- We are based at the Gloucestershire Heritage Hub in Gloucester
- We collect and care for the records of Gloucestershire & South Glos
- We collect anything on paper!
- We have around 10 million records
- The oldest record is 900 years old
- The most recent is this year



- 25 members of staff; 130 volunteers
- Large site: storage, offices, reception, lunch area, seachroom and Family History Centre, garden plus a conference suite
- Digital presence: 5% of collections digitised, websites, social media and online talks
- As well as visiting researchers, we work with local history/special interest groups & schools
- Lots of events

Improving access

- Physical access in the public areas: lift, level flooring, lighting, wheelchair access
- Training – county council courses, in-house training, external workshops
- Customer service: friendly, 1:1s, flexibility
- Collections: what we collect and how we sign post it
- Groups – neurodiverse art group, adult art group with learning disabilities, schools, nurses (mental health)
- Digital access - website



Blind & Visual Impairment Access

- Blind & Visual Impairment training for Customer Service Team
- Blind and Visal Impairment audit of the site
- Reading the Records workshops



Reading the Records with Gloucestershire Archives



Are you Blind or Visually Impaired?

Want to explore local & family history?

Want to handle historic records & learn how we care for them?

Join us for 6 free sessions supported by our friends at the Sight Loss Council & Gloucester Talking Newspaper

Venue: Gloucestershire Heritage Hub, Gloucester, GL1 3DW ~ FREE parking

Guide Dogs & Carers welcome ~ Refreshments provided

- Wednesday 1 October, 1-3pm: Welcome to Gloucestershire Archives
- Wednesday 8 October, 1-3pm: Treasures of Gloucestershire Archives
 - Wednesday 15 October, 1-3pm: Police Archives
 - Wednesday 22 October, 1-3pm: Sounds of the Archives
 - Wednesday 29 October, 1-3pm: Exploring your Family History
 - Wednesday 5 November, 1-3pm: Memories of School & Childhood

Book your space by contacting Gloucestershire Archives archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk

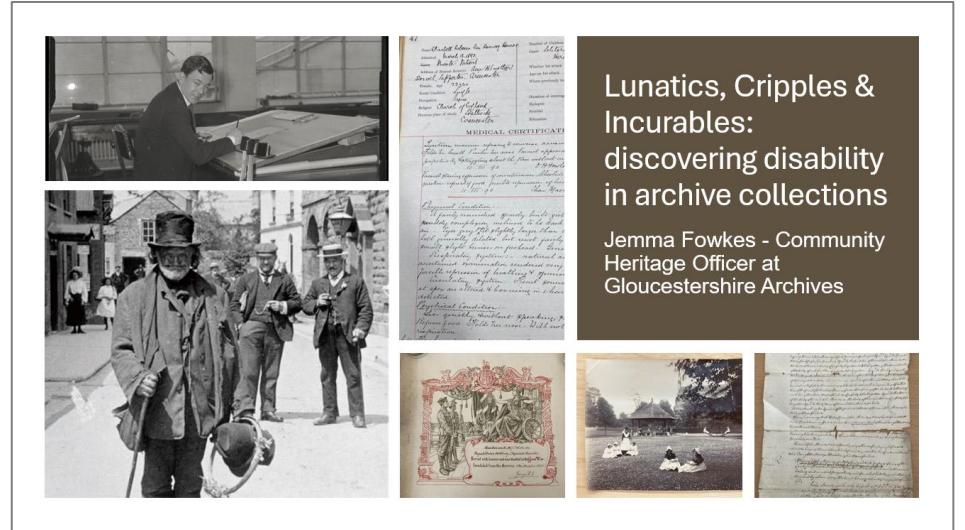
or call 01452 425295 & ask for Jemma or Helen

Research into disability records

The aim of the research was to:

- Identify what records we hold relating to disability
- To look at what areas the records covered (and didn't)
- To explain to customers how to find and use the records themselves

The research has been conveyed in 2 talks and there will also be a help guide



Defining disability today



- 2021 census: ***“Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?”***
- Answering yes would class as being disabled.
- If yes, further questioned: ***“Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?”***
- In the 2021 census, for England, 17.7%, 9.8 million were classed as disabled
- In the South-West, approximately 7% were “limited a lot”
- Approximately 11% were “limited a little”

Are 17.7% of records in Gloucestershire Archives written by someone with a disability? How would we know?

Collections at Gloucestershire Archives

- ‘Disability’ brings up 85 hits on the Online catalogue
- Out of millions of records!



Heritage Hub > Archive Catalogue > Search > Results

All words **disability**

Date range: (1885 - 2010)

Collection

Archive records (75) Local studies (9) Index entries (0) Names (0) Places (0) Subjects (17)

Displaying 1 to 50 of 75

Item Records of Gloucestershire Area Ramblers' Association collected by Antony ("Tony") John Drake MBE (1923-2012) > Papers related to highway operation and access > Acts and legislation **Disability**, 1997-1998

...Contains material related to **Disability** Discrimination Act 1995...

Series Gloucester City Council > Council and committee meeting papers > Committee meetings papers **Disability** Equality Forum DC1267/4/1/19 ★

Item Gloucester City Council > Gloucester City Council > Box 15 **Disability** Equality Forum, 1996 DC144/Box 15 ★

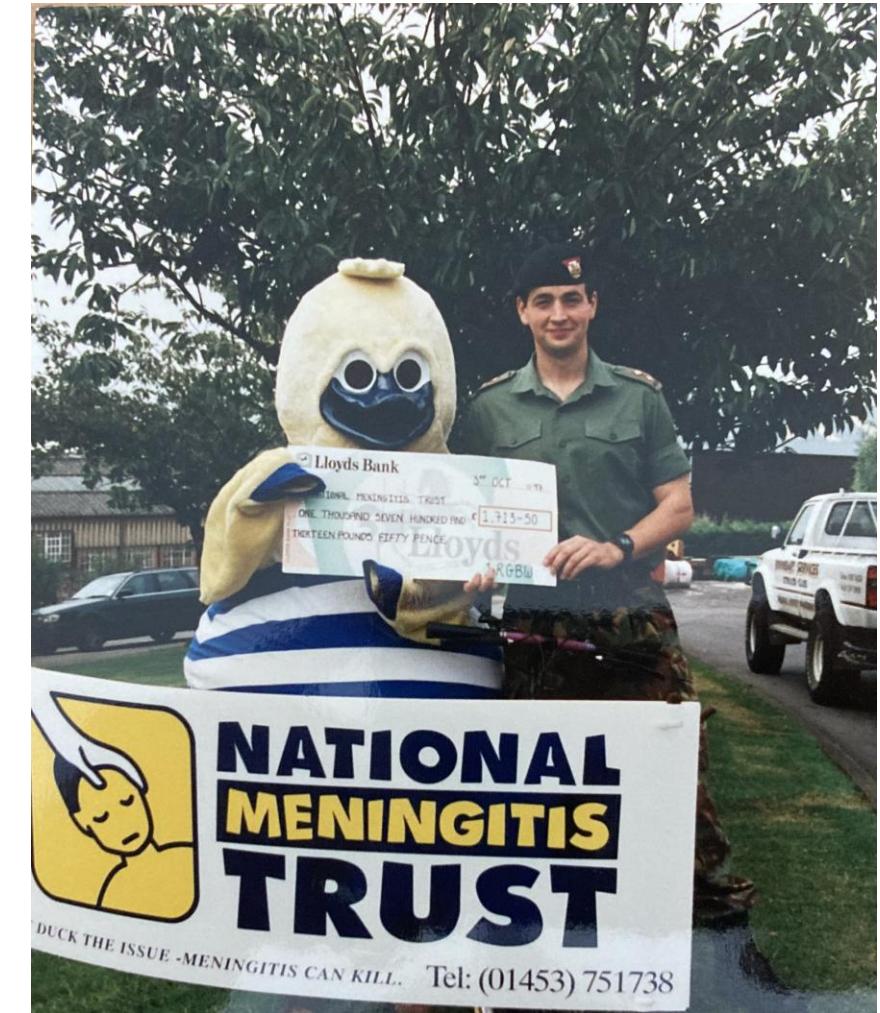
Item Gloucester City Council > Gloucester City Council > Box 20 **Disability** Equality Forum, 1997-1998 DC144/Box 20 ★

Item Gloucester City Council > Gloucester City Council > Box 30 **Disability** Equality Forum, 1997-1998 DC144/Box 30 ★

Order by: Relevance << First < Previous | 1 | 2 | Next > Last >>

Why so few? ?

- Most of the records flagged with ‘disability’ come from the last 40 years.
- The move towards better provision and access has been well documented in council minutes and school records, hospital documents and in charity collections.
- Specific terms are more successful when searching, though modern terms like Neurodivergent and ADHD again only appear in very recent years.
- If you want to look up disabilities, it is easier to locate documents using the language of the time.



Noel Taylor, Gloucester Barracks, Oct 1992, Gloucester Citizen newspaper (Ref: D10638-2-13-41)

Best way to locate records on disabilities? Use historic terms

- Blind
- Cripple
- Deaf/deaf and dumb
- Defective
- Epilepsy/falling sickness
- Feeble-minded
- Fool
- Freak
- Idiot
- Imbecile
- Impotent
- Incurable
- Insane
- Lame
- Lunatic
- Mad/madhouse/mad doctor
- Mental deficiency/ mental handicap
- Moron
- Natural/natural fool
- Senile decay

644	Ditto 158	1	Berry Ethel	M 19	95	M Jeweller Gem Setter
		2	Berry Ambie L	F 59	96	M Piano Stamp Operator
1/644	Ditto 159	1	Bauer George E	M 22	June 13	S Painter Sign Painter
2/644	Ditto 160	1	M' Cormack Ethel	M 13	Jan 01	M Paint Hitter Motor Car
		2	M' Cormack Lila	F 21	Sept 09	M Domestic Radio

This record is officially closed.

4/644	Ditto 162	1	Markland George	M 32	Jan 78	M Engineers Labourer
		2	Markland Lila M	F 10	June 78	M House Wife

This record is officially closed.

Image from the 1939 Register, a census created at the beginning of WWII. Patricia McCormack is described as "Blind Imbecile"

Ease of finding records

In terms of what you might find using these terms, records relating to disability can be divided roughly into two groups:

1. those *before* 1800,
and,
2. those which came *after* 1800



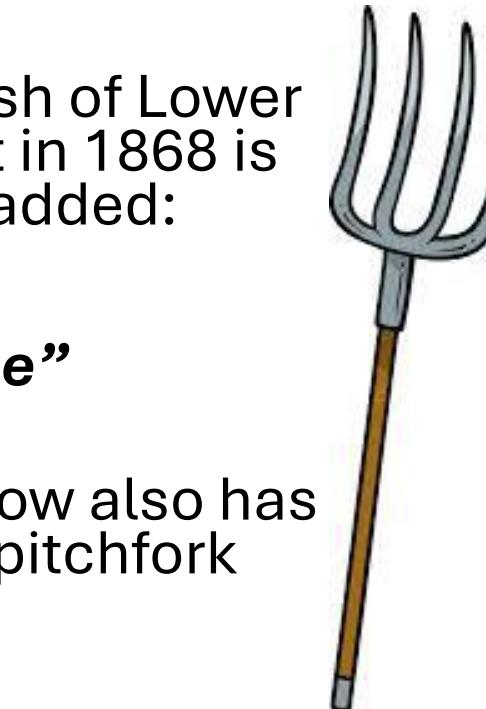
Above: A photograph of a child with smallpox, taken in Gloucester in 1896. (Ref. D9391)
Photography was not invented until the 1800s. But even once it became more common in the 1900s, there are few photographs which depict disability

Disability is often referenced because it is unusual or remarkable:

- Occasionally, a person's disability is referenced in parish records.
- In this register of burials for the parish of Lower Swell, the burial of Richard Watcraft in 1868 is listed. An additional note has been added:

***“Deaf and Dumb
Killed by a runaway horse”***

- Was this added because it was unusual/remarkable? The burial below also has a note listing a death by falling on a pitchfork
“...a frightful death!”
- Was being deaf and dumb believed to have had an impact on Richard's death?



Page 39.

BURIALS in the Parish of Lower Swell in the County of Gloucester in the Year 1867-68

Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
Thomas Morris	Lower Swell	July 13	63	David Rose
No. 305.				
Job Holtham	Lower Swell	Jan ⁷ 4	4	David Rose
No. 306.				
Emily Sarah Bolton	Lower Swell	Feb ⁷ 15	38	Rev. W. B. Venner P. C. - Parochial Minister
No. 307.				
James Thelwall	Lower Swell	August 10	92	David Rose
No. 308.				
Richard Watcraft	The Union Stow on Wold	Nov. 7	65	Rev. W. B. Venner P. C. - Parochial Minister
No. 309.	<i>Deaf and Dumb killed by a runaway horse</i>			
Isaac Ratteaway	Stow on Wold	Nov. 10	37	David Rose
	<i>fell from a cart, and was thrust through a hay fork Nov. 10. A frightful death. He had served his time in the marines. Richard.</i>	15- Sunday	37	
Elizabeth Foster	Lower Swell	March 6	4	Rev. W. B. Venner P. C. - Parochial Minister
No. 310.				
William Wilcox	Lower Swell	April 30	61	David Rose
No. 312.	<i>Septicose to A. Hartley.</i>			

No. 308.

Richard Watcraft	The Union	Nov. 7	65	Rev. W. B. Venner P. C. - Parochial Minister
No. 309.	<i>Deaf and Dumb killed by a runaway horse</i>			

(Ref. P322-IN-1-6)

Disability is sometimes referenced in innovation:

Teaching the Deaf & Dumb Language

- These letters were written by James L Dighton in 1796. They were written to his sister “**for the benefit of her youngest daughter**”. His niece, Arabella, was deaf and dumb.
- James explains his methods of teaching the deaf and dumb language. James gives a very practical and detailed account: “...**putting the child's finger again in your mouth, pronounce strongly the letter...with great force towards the palate...it produces a kind of smile very visible to the eye**”.

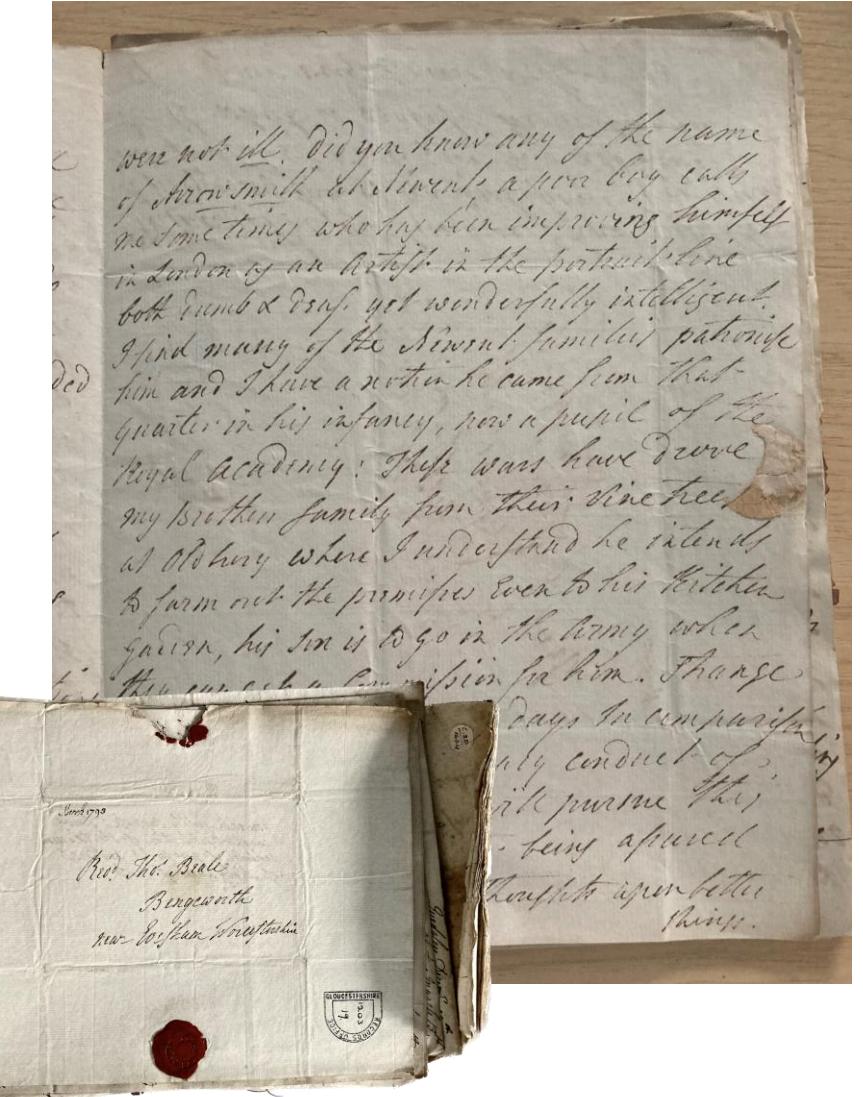
(Ref. D36-F19)

Positive portrayals of disability can be found: Arrowsmith, Deaf and Dumb Artist from Newent

In a letter from Charles Hayward of Quedgeley to his cousin, the Rev. Thomas Beale, Hayward discusses a local artist:

“Did you know any of the name of Arrowsmith of Newent, a poor boy calls me sometimes who has been improving himself in London as an artist in the portrait line. [He is] both deaf and dumb, yet wonderfully intelligent. I find many of Newent families patronise him and I have a notion he came from that quarter in his infancy, now a pupil of the Royal Academy.”

(Ref. D1203-19)



A successful career?

- Thomas Arrowsmith, was born deaf and educated at home by his older brother, John. His brother published *The Art of Educating the Infant Deaf and Dumb*, which advocated the integration of deaf children into conventional schools.
- We know that Thomas attended the Royal Academy in 1788/9. The letter from Charles Hayward was written around this time.
- Here we can see one of his portraits, which was recently sold. The painting is dated to 1825, suggesting that being deaf did not prevent Thomas from leading a successful career as an artist.



Upsetting records relating to disability

- Sadly, records relating to suicide are often the main evidence we have of mental illness in the distant past.
- In this register of baptisms, marriages and burials for the parish of St Catharine, Gloucester in 1733 we have this record:

May 6th: was buried Young Widow

May 17th: in my Absence at Ledbury the Wife of Purnel, a Gardener, who hang'd herself by the Coroner's Inquest [meaning the inquest determined it was suicide by hanging]

Was brought in Lunatick & was put in the ground in the Church Yard without the Burial office thro' the gross negligence of the Clark in not procuring a Minister

Particularly in not applying to Mr Elliots, who staid at Home expecting Notice from him

(Ref. P154-7-IN-1-1)



- All of which means that the woman was buried in the churchyard without a funeral service.
- It is likely that this was because suicides weren't supposed to be buried in consecrated ground. This might explain why the curate was not pleased when he found out.
- The reference to "brought in lunatick" presumably means that the coroner determined that she'd committed suicide while the balance of her mind was disturbed.
- And after all that they didn't even bother writing down her name.

Disability is sometimes used to sensationalise stories: 'Crippled' soldier

- The word “cripple” originally referred to someone who crept, limped, or was physically impaired. The word was recorded as early as 950 AD.
- Later it was used to describe a person with a physical disability, often unable to walk.
- Cripple continued to be used as a medical term until the second half of the 20th century.
- By the 1970s, the word came to be regarded as offensive.
- However, ‘crippled’ as an adjective is still being used here in the Gloucester Citizen in 1991.
- It is used to describe James Gutherie’s fight with the council over appropriate disability accommodation. Gutherie, an ex-bomb disposal expert was injured on duty.
- The use of crippled is likely being used to incur sympathy or to sensationalise the story.
- More recently, members of the disability rights movement have reclaimed words such as “cripple”, “crip”, and “gimp”.

Crippled soldier in housing battle

NEWS EXTRA

On display

HISTORIC gramophones and records will be on display in Cirencester next month. The exhibition at the Niccol Centre is being held to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the City of London Phonograph and Gramophone Society. Entrance is free and the show runs from September 2 to 7.

Shop damaged

BURGLARS who reversed a car through the window of a shop in Queudeley sped off empty handed when they triggered an alarm. More than £600 worth of damage was caused by the attempted raid.

Selling fast

CHATSHOW host Des O’Connor will be appearing at Cheltenham’s Everyman Theatre next week. Tickets are selling fast and can be obtained from the box office for £7. The August 25 show starts at 7.15pm.

Garage raid

LONGFORD sewage works employees smelled a rat when they found a garage broken into. Saws and drills worth £2,200 were stolen in the raid.

Desperate

“It makes me feel very bitter to serve my Queen and country and be treated like this, I cannot understand it,” he said.

“It is desperate that I get somewhere in the next couple of weeks, otherwise I am going to have to cancel the operation.”

His wife Joann (25) has suffered a nervous breakdown and, together with their two young children Cassandra (2) and Daniel (4), has bronchial asthmatic problems.

Tewkesbury Borough Council has offered the family a two-bedroom ground floor flat, but Mr. Gutherie says he is desperate to obtain a house for his family.

Twenty letters of support have arrived at the council from welfare and social services bosses and Cheltenham General Hospital while Mr. Gutherie has received one himself from Prime Minister John Major.

■ James Gutherie with his medals, medication and letters of support.

by Jane Riddiford

Priors Park councillor and leader of the Labour group Chris Burke, who has taken up his case, said Mr. Gutherie’s card had been temporarily lost or withdrawn from the three-bedroom housing list and he could well have missed out on opportunities.

Council housing manager Hugh Aldridge said: “We’re very sympathetic to his situation, he has medical priority and he’s very well placed on the waiting list, but there are other deserving and needy cases.”

Examples of how people managed with disabilities can be found: an early photograph of a wheelchair

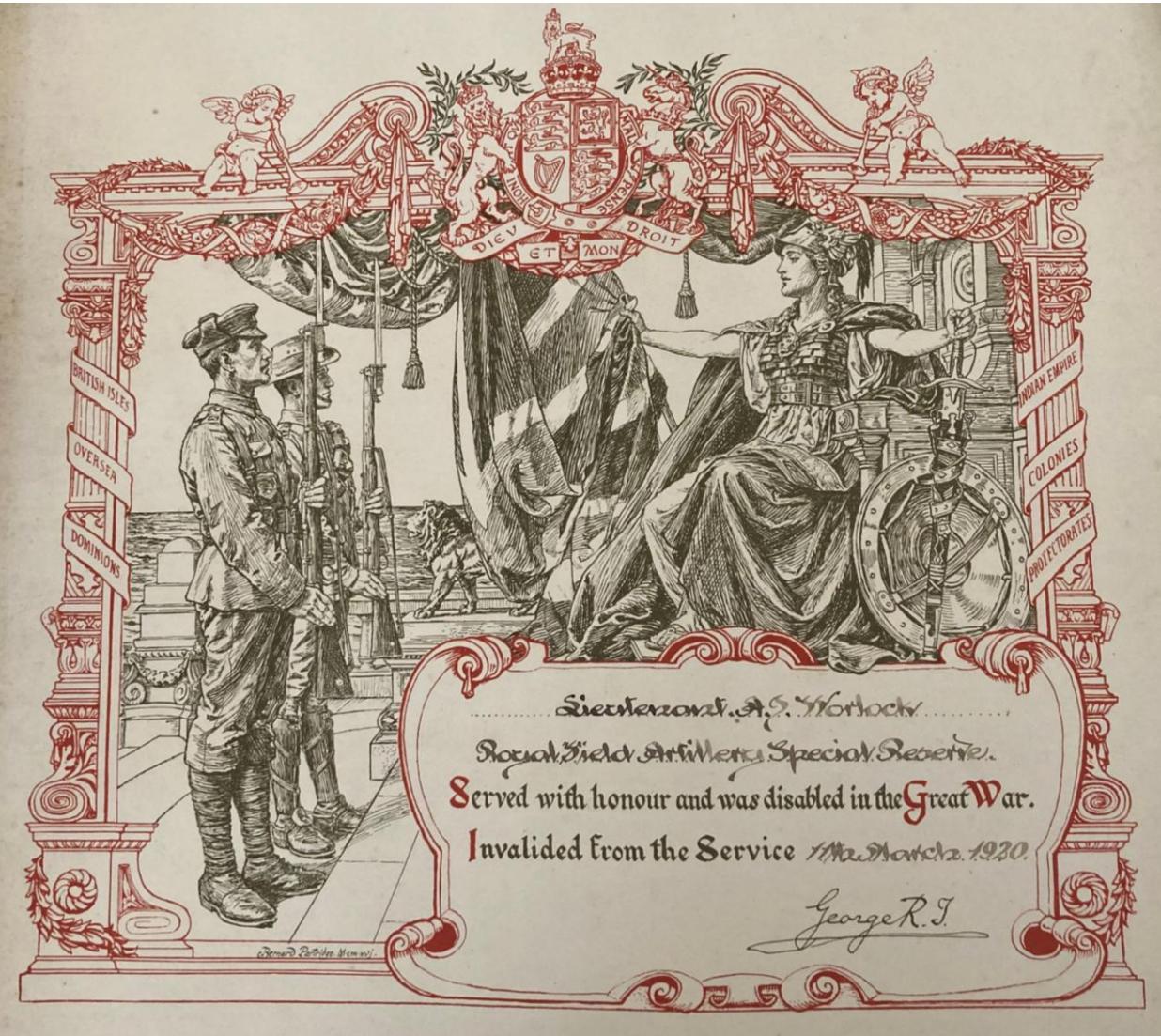
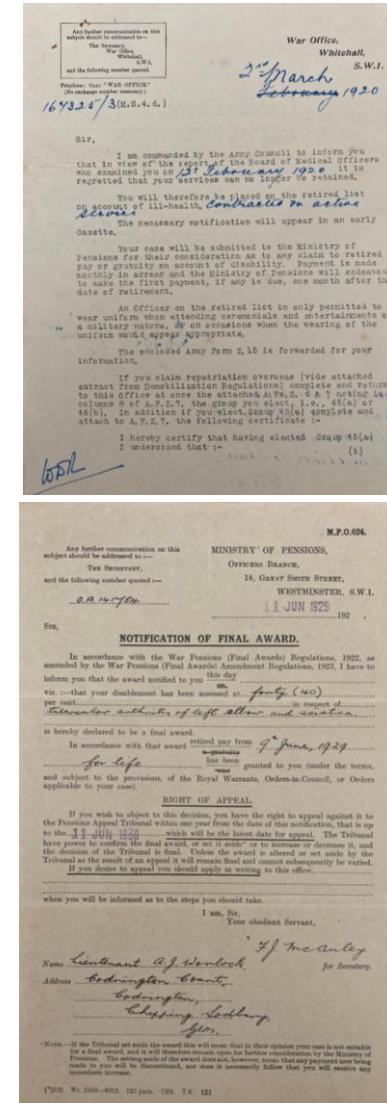
- Wheelchairs have likely existed for thousands of years.
- The first self-propelled wheelchair was created in 1655, a long time before the bicycle was invented!
- This is Colonel Cracroft of Hackthorn & Harrington, c.1865, a military officer.
- The wheelchair he is using is a Bath wheelchair, named so because it was invented in Bath.
- The chair could also be pulled by a horse or donkey.

(Ref. P13/IN/4/6/1)



The records can indicate changes of attitudes towards disability: Disability and the First World War

- Throughout history, disabilities have often carried a stigma
- However, with 1.5 million soldiers returning from WWI wounded, attitudes changed
- Here we see the personal papers of Arthur Worlock, including his Disability Award and pension papers.
- Arthur was wounded whilst on active service. This resulted in arthritis of the left elbow and sciatica. He was retired from the military in 1920 as a result.



(Ref. D3979-11)

It is useful to see where current provision began: Special education provision

- In the past, children with disabilities were generally educated at home or not at all.
- Some children would have attended local schools, but they are rarely mentioned.
- Laws changed towards the end of the 1800s and schools were required to identify pupils with special education needs, initially those who were blind and deaf.
- In paperwork from Cheltenham Union in 1897, we can see evidence of this.
- The information included the children's current places of education, including the Home for Blind Children in Liverpool.
- As there were no education institutions in Gloucestershire for children with disabilities at the time, many went to schools outside the county.



Copy of
Return and
Statement
9/1/97.

Cheltenham Urban District Council.

N.B.—Enter Blind Children and Deaf Children separately, beginning with the Blind Children. If the space provided is insufficient, the Return may be continued on additional sheets.

Schedule to Circular 398.

Name of Child.	Whether Blind or Deaf.	Age last Birthday.	Address of Parent or Guardian.	Name of Certified School attended by Child.	If Child does not attend a Certified School, reasons for non-attendance.
John Blackwell	Blind	5		Home for Blind Children, 544-56 Devonshire Road, Liverpool.	
Clara Ann James	Blind	15	George Davies 96 Newbold Road	None	Has been taught privately by a Lady
Beatrice Arries	Blind	9	Frederick Arries		
C. A. Quincy	Deaf	14	2 Regent Place, Grindon Road 30 Colindale Park	Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Sydenham Park, Bristol	
Maria Smith	Deaf	14	Thos May Smith Gordon Seniors	Ditto	Ditto
Irene Davis	Deaf	7	Charles Davis Victoria St, Farnham	All Saints Infants School (Elementary)	
Charles Watts Smith	Deaf	13	Thos May Smith	Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Sydenham Park, Bristol	
Emily Adelene	Deaf	12	Gordon Seniors	Ditto	Ditto
John May	Deaf	10	"	Ditto	Ditto
J. J. Pater	Deaf	-		Ditto	Ditto

10th September, 1897.

X (Since date of return have left Institution.) 19/90

Signed E. J. Barnes
Clerk to the District Council, and Clerk to the School Attendance Committee.

(Ref. CRB-C3-2-5-2-5)

Some disabilities are much harder to identify than others: witches, ghosts & the supernatural?



- Mental illness can be harder to find in the earlier records
- Records relating to supernatural experiences may be evidence of mental illness and disorders, such as psychosis and epilepsy.
- In this series of papers collected between 1698 and 1705, we read about a variety of apparitions, miracles, prophecies and witchcraft, recorded in different hands.
- Might they tell us something about how mental illness was perceived at the time?

(Ref. D3549-6-2-4)



We can occasionally see both the language & the meaning of disability changing over time: government censuses

- From 1841, there was a census every 10 years providing information about UK individuals.
- From the 1851 census, the form included a column: **“whether Blind or Deaf and Dumb”**.
- This was extended to **“1. Blind 2. Deaf and Dumb 3. Imbecile or Idiot 4. Lunatic”** in later censuses.
- By 1911, the column was named **‘infirmity’**.
- In this 1901 census for Westbury-on-Severn, William Whittington, aged 23, is labelled an **“imbecile”**.
- By the 19th century, imbecile was used as a medical term.
- This would be defined as a severe learning disability today.

Administrative County (C. Gloucestershire)

Civil Parish: WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN
Ecclesiastical Parish: WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN
County, Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District: WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN
Urban District: WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN
Parish: WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN
Parish Boundary: of
Parliamentary Borough: Division of
Parish: of
Village or Hamlet: of

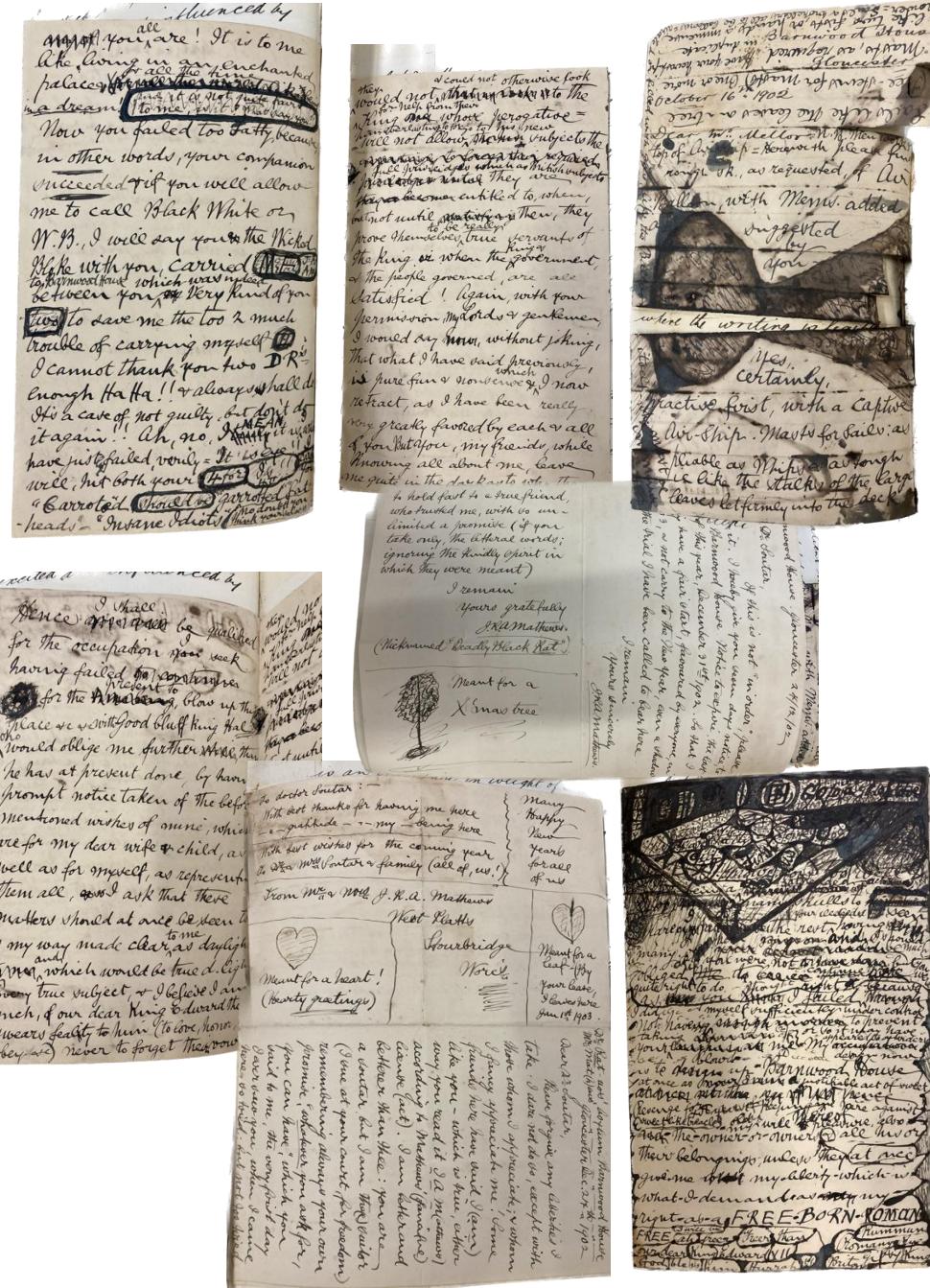
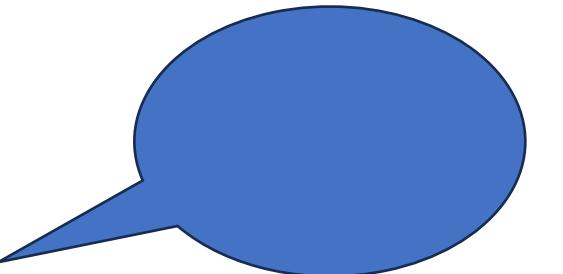
The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the
Parish of
of

Col. No.	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	No. of HOURS Uninhabited	Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Age last of Main	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	Employer, Wife, or Own account	If Working at Home	WHERE BORN	Page 8				
										3	4	5	6	7
51	Clement's College 1		4 George Lane Head M 51	Head of Family		Cattleman on Farm	Worster		Glos. Tewkesbury	(1) Deaf and Dumb				
			Margaret his wife	Wife	45	Worshipper	Worster		Glos. Whittington	(2) Blind				
			William his son	Son	11				Do	(3) Lunatic				
			Hannah his daughter	Daughter	10				Do	(4) Imbecile, feeble-minded				
52	Bincote Farm 1		4 Charles Daniels Head M 25	Head of Family		Labourer on Farm	Worster		Glos. Tewkesbury					
			Harriet his wife	Wife	44				Do					
			Edward his son	Son	16				Do					
53	Broadgate Cottages 1		4 Henry Morgan Head M 75	Head of Family		Labourer on Farm	Worster		Glos. Tewkesbury					
			Ann his wife	Wife	65	Labourer	own account		Do					
			Freda his daughter	Daughter	42	Company boy to Messrs. Royal Gunpowder			Do					
			Ann his wife	Wife	36	Gardener			Do					
			Carrie Weston widow S	Widow	70	Gardener (short)			Do					
			James Head M 65	Head of Family		Coachman for Council	worker		Do					
			Harriet his wife	Wife	61				Do					
			Etel Mitchell Grandchild B	Grandchild	10	Coachman	worker		Do					
			Samuel Peedey Head M 38	Head of Family		Coachman	worker		Do					
			Richard Weston Head M 50	Head of Family		Coachman	worker		Do					
			Mary Jane his wife	Wife	35				Do					
			Carrie his daughter	Daughter	12				Do					
			Walter his son	Son	10				Do					
			Fred his son	Son	6				Do					
			Agnes his daughter	Daughter	3				Do					
			Cuthie his daughter	Daughter	2				Do					
57	Do 905 1		4 William Whittington Head M 68	Head of Family		R. Painter	worker		Glos. Tewkesbury					
			Elizabeth his wife	Wife	53				Do					
			William his son	Son	23				Do					
			Alfred his son	Son	18	R. Painter	worker		Do					
			Mary Ann Cannock Head wife S	Head of Family		Living on own account			Do					
			Do 907 1		1				Do					
Total of Schedules of Houses and of Tenements with less than Five Rooms				8	1	6	Total of Males and of Females...	15	13					
Note - Draw your pen through each word of the headings as are inapplicable.														
PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE REFERENCE: RG 13 / 2417 CROWN COPYRIGHT - NOT TO BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT PERMISSION														
OM SCALE 1 2 3 4 5 6														

William Whittington	Head	M 68	1 R. Painter	worker	Susan Tewkesbury
Elizabeth his wife		53			Elizabeth Whittington
William his son	Son	23			Do
Alfred his son	Son	18	R. Painter	worker	Do
		1			Do

The records are very limited when it comes from hearing from those with disabilities

- The letters seen here are a rare survival of a patient's voice
- The letters were written James Richard Amphlett Matthews. James was a patient at Barnwood Mental Asylum from 1902 to 1903.
- James was a 45-year-old manufacturer with no previous mental health issues. He had been a **"quiet, even-tempered"** man until 5 days before admission.
- His symptoms included rapid and incoherent speech, maniacal laughter, threatening violence against previous employers and wife, paranoia and delusions, lack of attention
- Physical health good except a hernia
- Cause: **"overwork"**
- Given sedatives



James Matthew's letters

The letters were written from James to Dr Soutar, his Doctor. Dr Soutar commented on James' letters in the case notes:

“The letters which have been inserted show very well the confused and rambling state of the patient’s mind...”

(Ref. D3725-1-190-2-8 + 7)



When the records are present, they do not always offer the insight you might hope for

When greek meets greek
Matthews & Soutar
Then comes the tug, of war

Promises are not made,
like pie-crusts, to be broken
"Heads are in war-fair
doctor-Soutar

1303
Wants to be free
1-1-03
Hopes you'll agree
R S V P =
"Hurray, Hurray"
"Hip, hip, -"
"You are, you are"
"J. G. Soutar" (signed)

Our program will be
Carried out, like me

Our program shall be
"Secret you see
Signed: - J. G. Soutar, ^{Brother} R.A. Matthews, ^{Daughter} Soutar
Doctor Rat vols
And Matews RA
Couple of brothers &
Well meant, well met

Still, in spite of all that's been written, said & done: -
Doctor, understand
I'll not force your hand
I have too much sense!
I hope to act sense
And non-sense no more.
For ever and ever more
To study bible lore!
Daedalus
Dead, allus (always)
To evil wishes
Too bad, whichis (witches)

I might go on, for ever.
Man may come & man may go
That I go on, for ever!
However I don't want to
be a tease. If you want
to tease me, put 2 t's in
"Matthews"

Yours sincerely
J.R.A. Matthews
D. B. R.
Don't be rude
Know (no) I won't!

When Greek meets Greek
Matthews [James Matthews is the patient and writer] & Soutar [James Matthews' doctor]
Then come the tug, of war

1303

Wants to be free

1-1-03

Hopes you'll agree

RSVP =

"Houray, Houviar"

"Hip, hip, -" -"

"you are, you are"

"J. G. Soutar" (signed)

Still, in spite of all that's been written,
said & done: -

Doctor understand

I'll not force your hand

I have too much sense!

I hope to act sense

And non-sense no more.

For ever and ever more

To study bible lore!

Daedalus

Ded, allus [?] (always)

To evil wishes

Too bad, whichis (witches)

Promises are not made,
Like pie-crusts to be broken.
Heads are in war-fair
Doctor-Soutar

Our program will be
Carried out, like me
- - - - -

Our program shall be
- " secret you see
Signed: - J G Soutar

J R A Matthews brother Drs

Doctors Rat vols
And Matews RA
Couple of brothers &
Well meant, well met

I might go on, for ever.
Man may come & man may go
But I go on, forever!

However I don't want to
Be a tease. If you want
To teas me, put 2 t's in
"Matthews"

Yours sincerely
J R A Matthews

D B R
Don't be rude
Know (no) I won't!

In summary

- Only a tiny percentage of our records mention disability or are written by a self-identifying disabled person
- The best way to locate disability records is through historic terms
- Being blind, deaf, unable to walk or having epilepsy have historically been recognised as disabilities
- Disabilities such as Bipolar, ADHD, Autism and Dementia can be recognised in records via descriptions but were identified differently
- Some disabilities do not seem to have existed in the past, such as Schizophrenia and AIDS
- Some were far less prevalent, such as Dementia; others have all but disappeared such as General Paralysis of the Insane (Syphilis)
- Attitudes have changed over time, sometimes with opposite ideas co-existing.
- Records can be frustratingly limited, especially in conveying the voices of those directly affected



Nonetheless, there are avenues for us to explore if we want to know more about the lives of those with disabilities, especially from the 1800s onwards.

Researching records of disability from the past will help us to improve, broaden and signpost future collections



Top: Female patients seated on the lawn at Horton Road First County Asylum, c.1890 (Ref. HO22-27-3)

Left: Injured soldiers at Arle Court, a WWI military hospital. Taken between 1915 and 1918 (Ref. D15682-2)

What's next for Gloucestershire Archives?

- Applying for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund
- This will focus on all aspects of accessibility, from cataloguing to customer service to outreach
- Watch this space!

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